



**SCEPTICISM
ANSWERED**

Robert Roberts

SCEPTICISM ANSWERED

IN REJOINDER TO

S. W.'s ATTACK ON "THE TRIAL,"

IN A PAMPHLET, WHEREIN THAT EX-BELIEVER

VAINLY TRIES TO UNDERMINE THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST,
AS ASSURED TO THE BELIEVER IN

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST FROM THE DEAD.

BY ROBERT ROBERTS, OF BIRMINGHAM,

Author of the said work.

"Arise O God; plead thine own cause; . . . the foolish man reproacheth thee daily,"

(Psalm lxxiv. 22).

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TH**ERE** are times when silence is the best answer. I feel a little uncertain whether it is not such a time when a man who was privileged to know the truth not only turns away from it, but goes into the street and lifts up his voice against it in blasphemous denunciation. Were I to consider only the intrinsic merits of the pamphlet which he calls "A Reply to *The Trial*," I should take no notice of it. But I have to consider those who place their hope in Christ, some of whom might not be able at a glance to see through the thrice-stale sophistries re-hashed in the said pamphlet, and who might in consequence be needlessly discomfited in the reading of them. For their sakes, I dedicate to the writing of a rejoinder, a few days' of seaside leisure which my wife's necessities compel me to accept.

The pamphlet is no reply to *The Trial* at all (as I shall show), the argument of which its writer has failed to grasp. It has further to be remarked that the writer of the pamphlet does not come forward under circumstances affording the best guarantee of fitness to deal with the subject. He has hurriedly embraced other men's views on a subject which is of a multiplex and far-reaching character, and requires long and patient balancing of many things, which no man can even see all of (not to speak of weighing them) without years of reading and study. He rushes into print as an adversary of Christ within a few months of having broken bread in obedience to his commandment. He has simply, in a strong fit of predisposition, embraced the conclusions of Strauss, Taylor, and Co., at second hand, and re-hashed their vulgar diatribes with a forwardness and haste that is not decent in a man professing to feel sorrow at parting with the glorious hope of eternal life.

The pre-disposition we have spoken of explains the action, and evidences the incapacity of this publication. We will say nothing of a year's abstinence from Scripture reading, and non-attendance for a similar time at the Lord's table, before bringing his case against the railway company, further than this, that in spiritual as in natural life, a man who trifles with his stomach and then starves himself, is likely to become an easy prey to poison. It was not wonderful, under the circumstances, that the reading of Strauss and Co. should quickly take effect, and persuade a pre-disposed mind that the strait and narrow way was not a true way.

It is a symptom of S. W.'s incapacity to deal with the stupendous subject on which he has taken the enemies' side, that he reasoned wrongly about his troubles. Those troubles were great, and he had the sympathy of fellow-believers, who can weep with him even now at a calamity so great as the loss of a partner in life; but that he should come to the conclusion that trouble,

unremoved in answer to his earnest prayers, is an evidence of God's indifference, is indicative of a moral shallowness little qualifying him for the solution of the mighty problems on which he presumes to dogmatise with such confidence and harshness.

The case of Job is a standing rebuke to this class of presumption. Job took patiently—(that is, so far as any imputation against God was concerned)—the most calamitous visitations it is possible for a man to experience. He recognised God's prerogative to do as he pleased. Not only apparent neglect, but evident unkindness failed to stumble him. "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" was the question with which he silenced complaint. He was like David, another man after God's own heart, whose surprise was not that God neglected anyone, but that He took notice of mankind at all. "Lord, what is man that thou visitest him and the son of man that thou takest knowledge of him?" For this mood, there is entire warrant in the abnormal situation of things upon earth. Man has forsaken God and cast His law behind his back; and the wonder is that God has patience with any, and not that He suffers many to wander to death, while His little heeded invitation to life is doing its work in the generations. That God should hide His face is natural to the situation. That S. W. should not see this is indicative of a poor discernment of the majesty of God and the folly of man.

What if our prayers are not always answered in the form we present them, shall we say they are therefore unheard? The fact stated by Paul is one which the most elementary reason must recognise as true, that "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." We cannot judge our needs in relation to the issues of immensity in time and space. It is revealed that we require chastisement, and can only learn obedience in suffering; what then, if, when the suffering comes, we pray that it may be removed, and it is not removed, is it the part of reverential reason to blaspheme God, and declare that He is regardless of the well-being of His creatures? Is it not rather the attitude of truest reason to say, "If it be possible, let this cup pass; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done?" S. W. took the former attitude—not the latter. The inference is obvious as to his fitness to deal with a subject peculiarly calling for intellectual grasp and reverence for the infinities.

I should not have referred to such a personal matter were it not for its bearing on the higher interests S. W. has chosen to assail. Had he observed that part of sorrowful silence which would become a man professing grief at having to abandon the hope of eternal life, we could but have united our sorrow in silence with his; but as he has chosen to play the part of a dangerous beast of prey, he cannot hope to escape the measures necessary for the defence of the travellers on the road.

R. R.

Seaside, 13th May, 1884.

SCEPTICISM ANSWERED.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARGUMENT OF "THE TRIAL."

S.W.'s pamphlet professes to be a reply to *The Trial*, in which an extensive argument is elaborated in demonstration of the historic reality of Christ's resurrection. It is in no sense a reply to that argument. It may be convenient as a preliminary to the showing of this, to define that argument in the following series of propositions:—

1. The name of Christ is the ascendant name in the constitution of the European world at the present moment, and has been in that position for fifteen centuries.
2. Prior to that time, it was honoured only among private persons, who, however, were numerous in all parts of the Roman Empire.
3. Considering that it was an illegal and punishable offence to profess the name of Christ; that, as a matter of fact, it subjected the professor of it to grave temporal consequences, while, on the other hand, it offered no temporal compensation, nor even the solace of principles in harmony with human tastes and affections, there must have been some element in the case sufficient to account for such an extraordinary ascendancy of the name and faith of Christ.
4. The history of the matter exhibits this element in the resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
5. That history is contained in the New Testament.
6. That history is a reliable history for various reasons.
7. It is a history written by the men who had to do with the beginning of the movement, and therefore knew the facts they relate.
8. The men who wrote it, were proved true men by their submission to every condition of self-denial in the deliverance of their testimony; and by the fact that their principles were such that they gained no advantage, and could gain none by the promulgation of them.
9. It is a history of that character (taken together with the other documents with which it is bound up with them, forming together the NEW TESTAMENT) that could not have emanated from merely natural writers, still less from literary forgers and designing men.
10. The history, as we have it in the New Testament, is the history as originally written by the apostles, because all the versions, in all languages, and countries in the various ecclesiastical communions, compared with each other in the earliest MSS. extant, are the same.
11. It is the history written by the apostles, because it has been so considered from the very beginning of the Christian era, as proved by all Christian literature, and the unquestioned repute of the Christian community from its origin. All communities are witnesses of their own archives.

The New Testament could not have been palmed upon the early Christian community as the writings of the apostles, if they were not the writings of the apostles: because the New Testament is mainly composed of letters addressed by an apostle, not to persons but to churches, and these churches would have denounced writings representing to have been addressed to them if they had not been so addressed.

12. Being the authenticated production of the apostles and their companions, it is an official and reliable account of the causes that originated the Christian faith, and of a value equal to the depositions of witnesses.

13. Those causes, as narrated in that account, were the appearance, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ (of all of which the apostles were, and in these writings declare themselves to have been, "WITNESSES,") followed by the miraculous confirmation of the apostolic testimony by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

14. These causes are an adequate explanation of the establishment of the Christian faith in the world. Apart from them, there is no explanation of the undoubted fact patent to our eyes at the present hour.

15. The apostolic testimony to these having been the causes cannot, in reason, be set aside; because it is the testimony of eye-witnesses whose probity is guaranteed by the part they took, and whose ability to deliver a testimony is self-evident in the book itself. In the truest sense, the book is its own witness.

16. The case of the apostle Paul is of itself conclusive. An able, popular, and rising opponent is suddenly diverted from measures of persecution by the appearance to him of Christ alive, in the presence of witnesses who accompanied him on his persecuting journey, and were physically affected by the occurrence. As a further pledge of its reality, Paul was blind, and had to be led by his escort into Damascus, where he remained blind for three days, till cured by a friend of Christ. "This thing," as Paul told Agrippa in open court, "was not done in a corner."

17. The presence of miraculous power in the Christian community of the first century, is proved by the circumstantial arguments of Paul's epistles; and this presence is proof of Christ's resurrection.

18. The truthfulness of Christ's resurrection is necessitated by the relation which the event sustained to the previous history and literature of the Jewish people, in whose midst it occurred: and also by the purposes for which it was proclaimed by the apostles, as defined by Christ and by the apostles themselves in their letters and speeches. It could not have been made to have such a bearing or have been preached for such purposes, as a matter of human imagination; that is, if the resurrection were not a divine fact, but a human fancy.

19. The divinity of the events connected with Christ, is proved by the divinity of the events that established the Jewish nation in the earth, and by the divinity of the character and contour of the writings of Moses and the prophets.

20. Finally, the resurrection of Christ is not inconsistent with science, but merely outside science, as a manifestation of power not in the channel of ordinary phenomena. Further, it is the complement of nature's own fundamental indications, since it opens the door of hope where nature has none to show, but yet, where, in the greatness and glory of the universe, it says it ought to exist.

With the argument spread over these 20 propositions, and elaborated in *The Trial*, the pamphlet does not attempt to deal. In point of fact, the argument cannot be touched. A man must either ignore facts or invent fictions to get rid of the historic demonstration of the resurrection of Christ. He can,

of course, assert, and declaim, and pile irrelevant facts, but, in true logic, he cannot even formulate an answer.

S. W. does not seriously look at the demonstration contained in *The Trial*. He opposes it seriously enough so far as intention goes; but in true process of reasoning, he never comes into collision with it. He fights, but keeps clear of the enemy. He makes a shy at a few empty commissariat wagons returning by cross roads, but he never gets near the army impreguably entrenched on the other side of the hills. And even the wagons he cannot capture. The only thing he can do, he does do. He makes a noise, raises dust, attacks positions that are unoccupied, and retires in a satisfied state without having felt the metal of the foe, who, however, hearing the sound of his guns, detaches a column on his flank, takes him in the rear, and compels him to surrender.

S. W. condemns the personation of Mr. Bradlaugh in *The Trial*. He thinks it is untrue to nature, and inspired by animus. He has a "decided opinion" that Mr. Bradlaugh would have figured differently in an actual trial. It matters little whether *The Trial* faithfully represent Mr. Bradlaugh or not; but it has some significance if Mr. Williams should be mistaken in his view on the point. That he is mistaken, no competent person will doubt who reads the *Six Nights' Bradlaugh Debate*, which Mr. Bradlaugh admitted to be a correct report so far as he read it. A newspaper notice of *The Trial* (*Bacup Times*, Aug. or Sep., 1883), remarks upon the Bradlaugh portraiture of *The Trial* in particular, thus: "*The Trial* is very fair and impartial, and every one is permitted to speak to the life. *This is done to perfection in the case of Mr. Bradlaugh*. We could almost imagine that the junior Member for Northampton was really in the witness box. His spirit, manner, method, and his very words are *most characteristic*, and reminds one strangely of the debate which he held with Mr. Robert Roberts, of Birmingham, some years ago. This would incline one to the belief that the author of this anonymous work is Mr. Roberts himself." Yet, Mr. Williams, knowing little about Mr. Bradlaugh (as he admits in the pamphlet), and having "only read two small pamphlets written by him," presumes to challenge the character in which Mr. Bradlaugh is made to appear in *The Trial*—though the answers put into his mouth are largely copied from the debate, and pronounced by independent critics to be characteristic of the man. The significance of the circumstance lies here, that a man who can so misestimate men and writings contemporary with himself, is not likely to be very discerning in his treatment of the men and writings of the apostolic age from which he is so far removed in time and circumstance.

CHAPTER II.

ONE OR TWO INTERNAL FEATURES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

S. W. devotes his first few pages to animadversion on several features of the New Testament, which he contends to be inconsistent with the divine character claimed for Christ. He objects to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, because it apparently countenances an untrue view of the death state. His argument is that "God would not condescend" to give a parabolic sanction to untruth. He "submits" that God would not do so. How does S. W. know that God would not do so? Suppose S. W.'s notion on this point is only his own imagination! Suppose the revealed fact is that God does condescend to "deceive" perverse and wicked men to their destruction, as S. W. would draw Zulus into an ambush if he were fighting with them; or wild animals into a net—there is then no force in the objection. It is declared variously in the Scriptures that God does judicially deceive men (Ezek. xiv. 9; 1 Kings xxii. 23; Isaiah xxix. 10-12). Therefore the fact has to be taken into account in discussing a case alleged to be "grossly misleading." If we are to judge the Bible internally, let us judge it by itself, and not by our imaginations. If in a given case, there is a purpose to "grossly mislead" (which Jesus alleged to be the object of the parables as regards the Pharisees, to whom this parable was spoken—Mar. iv. 11-12), the employment of a parable calculated to have that effect is only consistent with the object of the teacher employing it. S. W. goes to work wrongly. If there was anything to impugn, it was not the parable, but the policy inspiring the parable with which the parable is avowedly in harmony. But neither can the policy be assailed. It is in the prerogative of divine wisdom and power to mislead if the case justly call for it. S. W. would mislead a burglar or a beast of prey without scruple. How can he deny a similar right in God towards hardened sinners?

The remarks on the temptation of Christ are unworthy of notice. Their object is not very apparent unless it be to suggest that the account of that temptation could not be a divine narrative. The very opposite conclusion so much more powerfully comes with the reflections that that narrative suggests, that we must dismiss S. W.'s comments on this head, with the remark that it would have been better for his reputation for moral discernment if he had left this subject alone. The idea that it was necessary to put Jesus to the proof would never have occurred to the infamous priests to whom he so glibly attributes the authorship of the narrative. The idea that it was possible for a man

who was the manifestation of God to be the subject of such a process would never have occurred to human doctrinaires, who, on the contrary, would have floundered, as S. W. flounders, among the metaphysical anomalies of such a conception. And least of all would they have exhibited a constant appeal to the authority of the Scriptures, as a reasonable and effectual rejoinder to the suggestions of the tempter. The conception is thoroughly non-ecclesiastical and unphilosophical and non-human throughout. Nothing but its divinity and its historic reality could account for its presence in the apostolic writings. But a man must have an artistic eye to see beauty. And a man must have moral discernment to see this subtle kind of quality which distinguishes human conceptions from divine.

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE.

S. W.'s attempt to represent Christ as teaching celibacy, every one must feel to be vain and absurd who is acquainted with the state of the case. The matrimonial institution never had so effectual a defender as in Christ. We are indebted to him for the present stability and purity of the institution in the earth. It was one of the things that embittered the hostility of his enemies, and stumbled the conventional views of even the disciples themselves (in the first stage of their understanding), that he insisted on the obligatoriness and indissolubility of the marriage tie. Divorce, he taught, was a violation of the Mosaicly-recorded institution. "From the beginning," there were neither plurality of wives nor admissibility of release. A man was to cleave to *his wife*, and the joining together was of divine appointment, and what God had joined together, no man was to put asunder (Matt. xix. 6). Any other usage that had become established in Israel was a mere accommodation to "the hardness of their hearts." "From the beginning, it was not so."

But there are times and circumstances when "it is good," to use Paul's expression, for a man to be free. Such were the circumstances of John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul. They had a work to do (in opening of the way to the Kingdom of God for others) which would have been greatly impeded by marriage. The form and public bearing of their work required for its effectual performance that they should be free from domestic encumbrance. But they were at liberty, nevertheless. Paul expressly says so for himself (1 Cor. ix. 5). If they remained unmarried, it was not because it was binding on them as a matter of righteousness, but because they chose it as an expediency their special work called for. Jesus refers incidentally to this phase of the matter in the conversation arising out of the question of the Pharisees as to the lawfulness of divorce (Matt. xix. 12). He does not

make it a matter of prescription. He does not enjoin it as a command. He leaves it open. "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." His allusion to it was drawn forth by the comments of his disciples on what he had said about the sacredness of the marriage bond. He justifies his doctrine of liberty in the matter by reminding his auditors of the well-known practice of making men unmarriageable for special purposes, to which, presumably, the Pharisees, whom he was addressing, did not object. Some, he pointed out, were born unmarriageable: some were made such by men, and, finally, there were some (John the Baptist and himself, to wit) who abstained from matrimony for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Eunuchism literal and practical eunuchism, are mixed in his allusions. "Made eunuchs of (or by) men" points to the one: "made themselves eunuchs" (that is, practically in the sense of abstaining from marriage) defines the other. What is there in all this to justify the repugnant suggestion that Jesus taught bodily mutilation as a condition of salvation?

It is difficult to believe in the sincerity of any man who refers us (as this pamphlet does) to Rev. xiv. 4 as a confirmation of the notion that celibacy is an apostolic prescription. A man incapable of the most elementary exercise of common-sense might be excused for making such a mistake. The passage refers, prophetically, to those "redeemed from the earth," and defines their characteristic to be that "they are not defiled with women, for they are virgins." If this is literal, it excludes women from salvation, although Christ recognised their part therein, and the apostles invited "both men and women;" and it excludes the very apostles themselves, who were married (1 Cor. ix. 5) in the face of the Lord's promise to them of the first place in the kingdom of God (Luke xxii. 29, 30). We might excuse a man from thinking it literal who was ignorant of these facts, or who had no knowledge of the symbolic character of the Apocalypse. But what are we to say of men who are aware of these things—who know that the Apocalypse is an exhibition of future things and events in sign—and that the most conspicuous feature of the symbolism is the employment of harlotry to represent spiritual unfaithfulness as incorporate in the State Churches, that were to arise as a family of public women in the earth, from whom the friends of Christ were to stand aloof,—I say, what are we to say of such men quoting such a statement for such a purpose? The most charitable view is, that they don't know what they are talking about; that they are without understanding, and, therefore, at the most, are guilty of presumptuously "speaking of evil, of things they understand not." If we are to credit them with understanding, then a much more serious imputation arises, which we prefer not to formulate. There is much sarcasm in the frequent borrowed reference of this pamphlet to "the ethical mind."

It was not unforeseen—yea, it was a process exemplified in Peter's own day—that men of unskilful and unstable minds "should wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction." There is such a thing as "*rightly dividing the word of truth*," which is but an equivalent expression to judging the meaning fairly, by reference to contextual considerations and the general drift of the subject spoken of. But the other operation is possible: there is always

abundant scope for incompetence or malice to stumble among the most carefully-guarded expressions. The ever-varying context of circumstances sooner or later supplies appearances which it requires a clear eye and an honest heart to discern in their true significance. In such cases, the designer or the quibbler, or the ignoramus, finds his chance. Doubtless, the infamous men of the early church found a Scriptural pretext for their corruptions; just as men with a bias now find occasion for their mock indignation at the immorality of Christ, and their wonderful zeal for "the ethical mind."

CHAPTER IV.

CHRIST AND "IMMORALITY."

But scarcely even an occasion for hypocritical grinace is supplied by the parable of the steward. S. W. says it is "thoroughly immoral," because the steward is made to falsify accounts. This is a reckless clutch at appearances. If the steward is commended (by his employer), it is not for his chicanery, but for his forethought in providing against a coming need; and in the same breath in which Christ relates his employer's commendation, he describes him as an "*unjust steward*," and appends this dictum: "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." If the parable had been spoken as a sanction to dishonesty, it might have been open to the charge made against it, but, on the contrary, it is made an occasion for its rebuke. The falsifier of his master's accounts is only introduced to illustrate the wisdom of providing for future need. The children of this world do it in their way: the children of light are exhorted to do it in theirs, by a faithful use of unrighteous mammon. The steward's situation was drawing to a close: life with all its opportunities and responsibilities is drawing to a close: and Christ would have us prepare as practically for the one contingency as the unjust steward did for the other. To call this teaching "thoroughly immoral" is to exhibit a shallowness that is something more than pitiable in a man presuming to pass judgment on Christ; or else, it shows a moral blindness which ought to have deterred the writer from venturing to call on others, as he does virtually by this pamphlet, to follow him in a path in which he is unfit to see his own way.

So, with the remarks on the parable of the Prodigal Son: they exhibit a crass incapacity of moral discernment. He calls the parable "a premium upon a vicious life," because of the remark of Christ that "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine *just persons*." (We pass over the gloss he adds to this, in remarks printed in inverted commas as if they were quotations from the narrative). S. W. has omitted the essential words from the sentence he quotes from Christ. He stops short at "just men." What Christ said was "just persons *that need no repentance*" (Luke

xv. 7.) Here is the point : there are none such, in fact. The description is aimed at the Scribes and Pharisees, who murmured at his keeping company with publicans and sinners, and "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others" (Luke xviii. 9). He told them he had not come to call the righteous, but sinners—to *repentance*. In point of fact, there were none but sinners : for "all have sinned:" and "there is none righteous," in the sense of persons not needing forgiveness, "no not one." But the Pharisees imagined themselves to be righteous, and out of the category of sinners. And Christ taking them at their own estimate, triumphantly vindicates his policy by their own premises worked out in this parable and comments.

But all this is invisible to the moral blindness that can speak of it as "a premium upon a life of vice." From such a blindness is also necessarily hidden the true meaning of Christ's saying on another occasion, that "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." He did not intend this as a disparagement of righteousness. It was an adroit condemnation of a punctilious Pharisee, who was scant in his courtesies to Christ, while marvelling at Christ's acceptance of a repentant sinner's affectionate offices. It was in fact one of those master strokes of incisive subtlety and grace that made the Pharisees at last shy of any encounter with Christ. But in the vulgar hands of the enemies of Christ, to whom S. W. has joined himself, and whose exploded sophistries he retails, it is "a premium upon a life of vice!"

CHAPTER V.

CHRIST AND POVERTY.

We cannot from such a class expect a reasonable appreciation of Christ's disparagement of riches, and his inculcation of submission to evil. There is a wisdom in them too high for "the ethical mind." It is, therefore, without surprise that we find them in this pamphlet characterised as "degrading and senseless injunctions," the inventions of "a lazy priesthood." A man must have a poor acquaintance with "lazy priests," who thinks they would be likely to enjoin the non-assertion of assailed rights, and the walking of an additional mile to please a neighbour. This is more contrary to the human instincts of "lazy priests" than of any other sort. It is contrary to human nature altogether.

Such teaching never came from man. It is not to be met with anywhere except as the re-echoes of Nazareth. But our ethical friends are discerning. They are not blind men. Oh, no! They have wonderful eyes. They can see where nothing is to be seen. Nobody told them that these maxims were the inventions of "lazy priests." They know it without being told. They "take it" that it is so. This is enough. They have no evidence that it

it so: they require none. There is evidence, on the contrary, that lazy priests had nothing to do with them,—but active apostles, who went to prison for their pains, and laid their heads on Caesar's block at last. But this evidence matters nothing to them, though it consists of—1, the incomparable documents of the New Testament of world-wide notoriety and renown. 2, the unchallenged consent of 50 generations of believers. 3, the explicit witness of all early writers, who had it in their power to form a judgment on the matter. What though the evidence is buttressed by the intrinsic character of the apostolic writing; by the fulfilment of apostolic predictions, and by the existence of the Jews and Christendom! All this evidence (incorporate with the very life of Europe at the present hour, and as palpable and inextinguishable as the geography of the world) is nothing to these lofty, vision-seeing gentlemen. They "take it," in spite of the evidence, that the New Testament is the work of lazy priests. What wonderful credulity in the professed foes of credulity! What astounding faith in the enemies of all faith! What amazing presumption! In what cloudland dwells "the ethical mind!"

Is it necessary to vindicate the maxims of Christ against the insensate charge made against them? Instead of being "degrading and senseless," they are in the highest degree ennobling and wise. They produce men of self-control and kindness. They generate humility and contentment. They inspire patience and faith while encouraging all the industrious activities of life. They do this by their very self-denying ordinances at which the enemies of Christ profess to be so shocked.

But they would have no power to do it apart from that belief in Christ with which they are united. Though self-denial is beautiful and wholesome, no man denies himself without a motive. It is the motive linked with these precepts that gives them their power—that God may be pleased—that salvation may be attained. This fact is proof that no man ever invented them. When man invents, he does so in harmony with his own capabilities and predilections, and not with reference to things out of his own control and beyond his natural sympathies. If Christ commended poverty, it was not for its own sake, but because in the natural workings of things, riches blind the eyes to the inherent vanity of things, and render it difficult for the possessor to enter the kingdom of God. The "senselessness" would have lain in the inculcation of wealth. This would have been human nature; but it would not have been wise. Many will yet have the proof in themselves of the wisdom of Christ's words—proof in the wrong sense. It will yet be found that "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith." "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

CHAPTER VI.

ASCETICISM AND S. W.'s CHARGES AGAINST THE CHRISTADELPHIANS.

"The ascetic life" was not "taught by Jesus." Asceticism is one of the many incrustations that have formed themselves on the faith of Christ in the lapse of centuries, through the fermentations of human corruption. The object of his self-denying commandments (such as not to enforce your rights at law) has been misapprehended. The principle of obedience (carried to the point of doing things against the grain), has been lost sight of in a "vain philosophy," which thought by "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats," to school the supposed "soul" into an ethereal state and temper: "which things," as Paul observed, "have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body." The precepts of Christ were in no way responsible for these fanatical extravagances, except in so far as they are unskillfully construed. The "liberty that is in Christ Jesus" includes the liberty to enjoy "every creature of God," which "God hath created to be received with thankfulness of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. iv. 3, 4: vi. 17). Christ was no ascetic, but "came eating and drinking" with a freedom that enabled his adversaries to libel him as a "gluttonous man and a wine-bibber." That S. W. should attempt to make the precepts of Christ responsible for asceticism, shows him either blind or perverse. He is merely lending himself to the malicious sophistries of writers whose arguments have long since fallen dead. The Christadelphians are not ascetics, because the apostolic word forbids them to be so: but even were it otherwise, their nonconformity would not prove that word wrong. Christ did not teach that "poverty was *in itself* meritorious:" this is S. W.'s gloss. Neither did he enjoin celibacy: the statement that he did is the falsehood of malice. His doctrine and that of the apostles who came after him are entirely in harmony. The "mass of absurdities," which S. W. alleges to exist in the apostolic writings, exist only in his disordered imagination.

S. W.'s charges against the Christadelphians are irrelevant to the argument. Nevertheless, we here give them that notice which is their refutation. They occur late in his pamphlet, but come in most conveniently for notice in this place.

1. Christadelphians do not cultivate celibacy because Christ has not enjoined it.

2. They do not sell all that they have, because Christ has not commanded it. The command to this effect which he once delivered, was addressed personally to a young man who professed himself anxious to be put to the test; and can no more be made generally applicable than the command to two apostles to bring an ass's colt.

3. They do not have all things common, because no such ordinance was ever delivered by the apostles. In a certain crisis, when persecution was pressing, and the confiscation of goods impending, the disciples did this thing; but, in ordinary circumstances, they lived as ordinary men, having rich and poor among them (1 Tim. vi. 17: Jas. ii. 1-2). If we are to do in ordinary circumstances what the brethren in the first century did in special circumstances, then must we sit up all night, and have kneeling meetings on the sea shore, or travel to Appii Forum to meet an apostle.

4. Such of them as are obedient do not indulge anxiety about future wants—for this was what Christ forbade, *μεριμνας*, eating care). They make the provision of the day for God-appointed wants by God-appointed means, as Jesus inculcated in his command to "gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost;" but they do not labour to be rich, nor foster the anxieties of those who have no God. They educate their children because they are commanded to do so.

5. Such of them as are obedient are by no means engrossed in questions of eating and drinking and clothing. Seeking first the kingdom of God, they believe and experience that these things are provided in necessary measure. If there are those of whom these things cannot be said, it must be remembered that "they are not all Israel that are of Israel."

6. So also with the accusation of high dressing, and non-submission to evil, all may not be completely subject to the requirements of the truth in these particulars. There may be some like S. W., who, while professing subjection to the commandments of Christ, would drag a company before the tribunals. But, on the whole, as a body, there is an earnest endeavour among them to carry out Christ's commandments: and in the day of the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God, S. W. may have to regret casting odium upon their honest and toilsome struggles.

CHAPTER VII.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN.

S. W. endorses the extraordinary hypothesis that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the production of "a celibate, woman-hating, money-grabbing priesthood, whose main objects were to keep the people in terror, in subjection, and to fill their coffers with the wealth of their dupes"! It is a

humiliation to have to refute such insanity: but we have to submit to humiliation in the way of duty some times. It requires but the merest glance to perceive the impossibility of such a theory. In fact, it has no claim to the dignity of "a theory." It is a reckless assertion—a mere guess—a wild guess—a perfectly gratuitous speculation, advanced not only without evidence but against all evidence, and in the face of things in the documents which render it impossible at the outstart. A celibate priesthood, in the interests of celibacy, launch a book which defends marriage from the corruptions of a married priesthood! A woman-hating priesthood, in enmity to woman, invent a narrative which honours woman as she never was honoured before (in making her a companion of Christ and honoured and loved by him), and by the influence of which, she has been exalted to a position of affection and honour ever since! A money-grabbing priesthood, in defence of riches, invent a poor Christ, poor apostles, and commandments discouraging wealth! A terrorising priesthood, to overawe a cringing constituency of dupes, exhibit the most touching picture of tenderness and love the world has ever seen! A corrupt and avaricious priesthood give to the world the purest and noblest moral ideal it is possible to conceive!

These are the monstrous corollaries of the theory hazarded by unscrupulous men who know nothing personally, or by evidence, of what they allege, and who seem to lack the commonest discernment of the workings of the human heart. Their theory is an outrage on common reason. It is inconsistent with the most elementary facts of the case.

The facts cannot be got rid of. The character of the books is one of them, and sufficient, but not the only fact. The books have been in the world for eighteen centuries, with the reputation of a certain authorship. This unbroken and uncontradicted reputation is an invincible fact that cannot be made to disappear from the history of the world. What is the explanation of it?

Never in all the world has any other but one explanation been received, or been possible in the case of any other book. Uncontradicted reputation of authorship is accepted as proof of Josephus, of Pliny, of Cicero, of Plato, of Homer, of Herodotus. It is accepted as such because it is such on a very obvious principle. Those who live at the time a book is produced, inevitably become aware of the true authorship of a book that is not anonymous. They cannot help it. The book brings the proclamation of authorship with it: and if the professed authorship were false, the fact necessarily leaks out, or more likely is proclaimed by the man to whom it is falsely attributed. Thus the lie is killed at the start. In the case of an anonymous work, if of a private character, there might be a possibility of a wrong impression as to its authorship getting abroad; but in the case of a book whose authorship is avowed, and especially if other people are concerned in the origin of it (as when a man writes letters to a society, or delivers speeches to a townspeople, and afterwards publishes them), the unanimous consent of those contemporary with its production is proof positive of its authorship, and the strength of this proof is as great after any lapse of time as at the beginning.

There is no case in which this evidence is so strong as in the case of the New Testament, because from the beginning, it has been a public document,

and in the hands of communities, and in the origination of its principal parts, more people than the writers were concerned. It is mainly composed of letters, of an avowed authorship, addressed to churches in various parts of the Roman empire. In case of a forged book, such features as these infallibly lead to detection. There might just be barely possible room for deception if it were a private and anonymous book, because in the case of a private book that appears without a name, the writer might succeed, if he had an object in doing so, in diffusing a wrong impression as to who had written it. But the New Testament is the case of a book presenting itself, at the very outset, as the writings of certain men, and as having been written, in the first case, to thousands of people, in the shape of letters direct to themselves. Possibility of mistake in such a case is absolutely excluded. The reputation of authorship, transmitted, under such circumstances, through all the centuries that have elapsed since the New Testament first came into the hands of Christendom, is absolute proof of its having been written by those by whom it professes, in the first case, to have been written.

But our poor friend of this pamphlet, shutting his eyes to this glare of light in the case, "submits" that the four gospels were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They were written by a "money-grabbing priesthood," and attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, only to give them a legitimate character. If we ask what proof there is of this assertion, there is none—absolutely none—not a scintilla. It is the merest piece of guess work in direct opposition to all the evidence, and in harmony only with the logical necessities of an argument that strains, by hook or by crook, to get rid of an otherwise unanswerable evidence of Christ's resurrection.

Not only is it a piece of gratuitous effrontery: it is a self-destructive manoeuvre, as lies generally are: for if a clever, though lazy priesthood, imagined that it would give their (impossible) invention weight and character in the eyes of believers by attributing it to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it must have been because there were such men in the certain knowledge of the Christian community: and that such men would be likely to write accounts of "the things most surely believed among them." If there were such men (the personal companions and witnesses of the Lord's sufferings and glory), what need for lazy priests to write an account which the inevitable needs and wishes of the first believers would have called upon the personal companions of the Lord to write? If there were no such men, how could the lazy priests have hoped to establish the reputation of their story by attributing it to them? We say nothing about the impossibility of lazy, lying, designing priests writing such a story, except that the suggestion is a gross outrage upon reason that never would have been perpetrated by men with any understanding of human nature, or any desire for truth, but for the necessities of a particular theory.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORGERIES AND GENUINE DOCUMENTS.

Forgery is the attempt to imitate the genuine; but S. W. sees no suggestion of true writings in the attempt to give currency to forged writings. False gospels to him carry with them no idea of true gospels. He finds a satisfactory explanation of the matter in the supposition of a man inventing a will that ought to have been supplied by a dead man. He is not shrewd enough to see that the true origin of the will in such a case, is the legal presumption that a man would make such a thing. It is the idea of a genuine will, and the legal necessity for it, that give rise to a false one. This obvious truth applied to the gospels, points to forged gospels as having originated in the idea that there ought to be true ones. If our gospels are forgeries, the idea of writing them must have arisen from the fact that there were men that could have written them, and who would be expected to have written them. And if there were such men, the writing of the true gospels would be inevitable. They must, from the universal working of things among men, have written accounts of things believed to be of such universal moment. And if they did so, what need for lazy priests putting themselves to the unnecessary trouble of writing books which their utmost and most perspiring industry could not have enabled them to write? So that even the idea of a forged will in the case of a man dying intestate, when properly worked out, involves the very conclusion it is introduced to exclude.

The citations from the early ecclesiastical writers show the gospels to have been both written and current in the generation after the apostles (and, therefore, for years before), when the launching of forgeries would have been a moral impossibility. But S. W. shows himself obtuse, or something worse, in relation to this argument. He does not appear to have perceived the object of the citations from "the Christian fathers." He admits the men in question wrote in the second century (and some of them—Ignatius to wit—near to the end of the first century, though of this S. W. says nothing); yet he says: "The fact that they quoted passages of Scripture," *i. e.*, New Testament Scripture—"proves nothing!" Does it not prove that the New Testament Scriptures in their day *existed to be quoted*? How could they quote from writings that had no existence? This is the whole argument so far as these "Christian fathers" are concerned.

The enemies of Christ maintain (without a shadow of proof) that the New Testament was not written till about 150 years after the crucifixion. We

prove it both written and in circulation within a generation of the crucifixion, by bringing forward authors who wrote at the end of the first and beginning of the second century, and who, in their writings, quote from the New Testament, and appeal to it as a familiar and currently recognised standard among believers in their day. S. W. says their quotation of the New Testament "proves nothing!" Remark is superfluous, except that it does seem as if colour blindness has its parallel in the logical faculty. Here is a man who cannot see proof as palpable as the evidence of sense in one direction, and gulping down, with extraordinary avidity, suppositions and theories in the other, of which there is not the least proof in the world, and which have no other standing ground than the audacity and ingenuity of learned malice.

"All these writers," says S. W., "were born in the second century" (no, not all of them: a number of them were born early in the first century: some of them before the death of Christ); "and," says he, "were full of the superstition of their times." Supposing they were so, in what way does this weaken the proof of the New Testament's existence contained in their quotations from it? No amount of superstition would enable them to quote from a book that had no existence. It matters not if they were fools, or murderers, or madmen, the proof would remain the same. Their quotation of the New Testament would show that the New Testament existed at the time they wrote; and this proves a great deal more; for the existence of the New Testament at so early a period as a recognised authority in a community widely spread throughout the Roman Empire, is proof of its having been written at a *much earlier period*; for it is not in the nature of things for a book to spring into such a position in a day. And, by the way, if these men were "full of the superstition of their times," how came they to produce such a book as the New Testament, as S. W. and his friends opine, without the least ground for their opinion? How comes there to be such an unutterable dissimilarity between the apostolic writings and the writings of the Christian fathers, if the men who wrote the one produced the other?

S. W. says, "I will now give a specimen or two of what the early fathers, quoted by the writer of *The Trial* as undoubted authorities were capable of believing." S. W. might have saved himself the trouble. If the early fathers were stuffed as full as a man can hold, of the puerilities and superstitions of the darkest periods of human history, it would not enable them to perform the impossible feat of quoting from a book that had no existence. They are not quoted by the writer of *The Trial* as "undoubted authorities," or authorities at all. They are called as witnesses merely. Only one question is put to them: "Did the New Testament exist in your day?" Their books show that it did, and for this reason, and for this reason *alone*, their books are referred to. To call this "quoting them as undoubted authorities," is indicative of a feeble state of intellectual apprehension, or else a facility of misrepresentation little qualifying the critic of *The Trial* for being a judge of the New Testament.

Suppose, hereafter, it came to be a question as to when *The Trial* was written—suppose a thousand years hence, a class of men arose, who, in spite of the evidence, contended it was not written till somewhere after A. D. 2000,

and suppose some defender of the truth were to cite S. W.'s pamphlet, issued A. D. 1884, as proof that it must have been written before that date, because the pamphlet refers to it and quotes from it (though very slightly), what would be thought of a man accusing said defender of the truth as holding up S. W. as an "undoubted authority" on the general question? He would merely call S. W. as a witness to a fact—not as an authority in any sense; and it would not detract an iota from the value of his evidence though it should be shown that his pamphlet was full of the sceptical shallowness and gullibility of his times. His pamphlet would be cited, not for the gullibility, but for the evidence it contained of *The Trial* at the date of its publication. The only course left to counsel on the other side would be to raise a great outcry about the shallowness and the gullibility with which the pamphlet abounded, in the hope that the cloud of dust thus raised would obscure the simple point established by the evidence. This is the course pursued by S. W. in common with the ungifted adversaries of Christ in general. He quotes the nonsense that "Christian fathers" have written, as if that in any way interfered with the fact that they quote the New Testament. He cheaply alleges that "the whole *Trial* teems with this kind of sophistry." Aye, it does, with *this kind*, which is no sophistry at all, but only what S. W. calls sophistry. In truth, it is invulnerable logic which S. W. has not touched so much as with the end of a hair. It is easy to call it "subtle, fallacious reasoning:" it is another thing to make a single fallacy manifest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUCCESS OF THE APOSTOLIC ENTERPRISE.

S. W. professes to be at a loss to conceive why the author of *The Trial* should contend that the apostolic enterprise subverted Judaism and Paganism, in view of said author's belief that the faith of the apostles became corrupted in the hands of their successors. He mysteriously hints at grave moral obliquity in such a contention, and thinks he might be putting a premium upon vice and crime were he to let it go unrebuked. We will pardon S. W.'s ethical distress on our account, and proceed to try and put his perceptions right, if that be a possible performance in the case.

The contention of *The Trial* is that there must have been truth and miraculous power on the side of a movement which, while offering no temporal inducements and forbidding the employment of violence (commanding rather submission to evil), triumphed over the forces of Paganism and Judaism in the teeth of armed power put forth in the defence of both. This contention we repeat with unabated emphasis. We contend that, as a mere problem of reason, the success of the non-fighting and adversity-enduring apostles, in establishing the profession of Christianity in the world against

the legal and organised opposition of Jew and Pagan, is inexplicable on the supposition that the apostles were the fanatical purveyors of a myth, and unsupported by the display of divine power. If there is moral obliquity anywhere, it must be where men shut their eyes to such a self-evident proposition.

But, says poor S. W., "the religion of Christ *as interpreted* by the writer of *The Trial* never has subverted Judaism and Paganism." What has this to do with the argument? The argument is not about any particular interpretation of the religion of Christ, but about *the historic fact* on which that religion is based. It was the historic fact of Christ's resurrection that was put in the foreground of the apostolic testimony; and it was this fact that was received by vast numbers in the teeth of persecution, and in the absence of all temporal inducement, and whose acceptance of it laid the foundation of the movement which enthroned the name of Christ in Imperial Rome in the fourth century. Although the doctrines associated with that fact came to be corrupted and lost sight of as the apostles predicted, this does not diminish, in any degree, the force of the fact itself having been established by the apostolic enterprise in the face of opposition, in circumstances of affliction and in the absence of all human motive. Such a fact demands an explanation which the resurrection of Christ alone furnishes.

S. W. tries to evade the force of this by substituting a question of interpretation for a historical fact. It was not an interpretation that drove Paganism from the throne of the Cæsars, or Judaism from its headquarters at Jerusalem. An interpretation could not have done it. It was the apostolic allegation and demonstration of Christ's resurrection that did it: and upon this we argued that, having done so, it must have had something in it equal to such an astounding performance, considering it made no use of force or inducement. S. W. either does not see the point of this argument, or he attempts to perform a feat which is known and rated at its true ethical character in other connections. We will charitably fall back on the former supposition.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARGUMENT FROM MAHOMMEDANISM.

S. W. next introduces Mahommedanism with an effect very different from what he intends. Nothing more conclusively demonstrates the divinity of the faith of Christ than a comparison of it with Mahommedanism in all points and particulars. Mahommedanism, says S. W., has never been adulterated. Quite so; it was a human invention at the beginning, and in harmony with human prejudices and passions in all ages, and therefore as there is nothing in human nature to change it, it continues unchanged in the human element

in which it subsists; a green cloth in a green dye vat is not likely to become purple. So it has been with all idolatries, and all religions—they remain stable because thriving in the element in which they had their origin. But a religion from heaven is as far above human sympathies as the starry sky above the earth. And hence, in the hands of men, it becomes corrupted, or, as S. W. expresses it, “adulterated.” The Jews turn to the gods of the heathen; the Christians adopt the superstitions and philosophies of the Greeks. The fact is proof of the divine origin of Mosaic and Christian revelation. The fact which S. W. insists on, with such vicious emphasis, is actually a proof of the thing he is using it to deny.

The Koran, with S. W., is “the masterpiece of Arabian prose.” This praise of Mahomet’s book is very suspicious. We cannot believe he has read it. He is but repeating the fulsome adulations of men who had an interest, as against the Bible, in extolling the Koran. The Koran is the outpouring of the most wretched drivel ever penned by man. We have read it, and speak advisedly. If this is the masterpiece, in what dreary flats and wastes must ordinary Arabian prose have found its level!

But S. W. might take a lesson from Mahomet. He credits him with a “powerful intellect.” Be it so. Mahomet believed in Christ. He frequently alludes to him in the Koran, and Mahomet had a “powerful intellect;” therefore belief in Christ is evidence of a powerful intellect. Why not? It is the logic of S. W.’s position. What about S. W.’s intellect who does not believe in Christ? Mahometans believe that Christ will come at the end of the Hegira; their religion was founded by a “powerful intellect.” What must S. W.’s intellect be, who not only does not believe that Christ will come again, but doubts if he ever came at all! He is not sure there ever was such a man! Though the world is full of crosses, he does not believe Christ was crucified! An intellect that beats Mahomet’s in power, would never display the logical obtuseness everywhere apparent in this pamphlet; and if the intellect that produced it is not equal to Mahomet’s, how dare the owner of it presume to deny Christ in whom Mahomet’s “powerful intellect” believed? S. W. having come into the arena as an enemy of Christ, must expect heavy blows in the battle. “No sane man,” says S. W., “will say that Mahomet was a God-sent prophet,” though he believed in himself. True, S. W., and if we had nothing to stand on but Christ’s own belief in himself, we should not now be found dealing hard blows in his defence. He did not ask us to take him on his own testimony. He appealed to the works the Father gave him to do, as being evidence that the Father had sent him (Jno. v. 36; x. 25; xv. 24), and foretold the crowning evidence of that work in his resurrection that should take place when his enemies, by the Father’s permission for His own purpose, should take his life by crucifixion (Jno. x. 17; viii. 28; Luke xviii. 33). Is there anything like this in the case of Mahomet? Where are his attested miracles? Where his resurrection? Where his ascension, which it would have been so convenient to invent, and so easy to obtain credence for, according to S. W.’s hypothesis about Christ? There is a total absence of common sense from Mahomet’s writings. There

were power and blood on the side of his fanatical pretensions. Success in battle alone made his religion successful. The sword at the throat of the conquered was the converting power; and yet S. W. can allow himself to say that “Mahomet brings far better testimony to prove his case than any that can be produced on behalf of Christ.”

The fact is, the history and nature of Mahometanism are the explanation of its establishment. And the history and nature of Christianity are the explanation of its establishment. No capable mind can study the history and nature of Mahometanism without seeing that it is a delusion: and no similar mind can study the history and nature of Christianity without seeing that it is divine, for if it was not divine, it was impossible in its facts. But the perversity of the school to which S. W. has allied himself lies here, that they will not look at the history in the one case, while extolling it in the other. They deny that Christ has a history. There was a Mahomet: but there was no Christ! There is an authentic Koran, but no authentic New Testament! There was a Mahomet who died, but not a Christ that was crucified! There was a Mahomet that came forth at the head of an army, but not a Christ who surrendered himself to his persecutors like a lamb led to the slaughter! There were lieutenants of the prophet, who carried Mahometanism in fire and sword to the ends of the earth; but no apostles of Christ who besought men, at the peril of their lives, to be reconciled to God!

It is one of the many proofs of the intrinsic truthfulness and sublime strength of the testimony for Christ, that his adversaries dare not discuss it as a history. They have to invent the insane theory that it is not history, but romance. But their invention does not change facts. Their theory cannot be maintained in harmony with the simplest rules of literary criticism; and, in point of fact, it has been generally abandoned within recent years. The historic reality of Christ and the authenticity of the gospels have forced themselves upon literary recognition through the sheer force of facts that cannot be reconciled with any theory of myth and invention. S. W. formally admits that “the vast majority of literary men and others do not question the authenticity of the Scriptures,” but tries to negative the force of the admission by the sweeping assertion that the bulk of them know nothing of the subject, and that, therefore, their opinion is of no value! But the fact remains, unweakened in the least by the reckless assertions of a class who, while claiming a monopoly of “light, intelligence, and deep research,” by their tactics establish an undoubted title to the reverse of these attributes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NATURE OF THE APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY.

S. W. takes an uneasy glance at one part of the argument of *The Trial*, and, thinking he sees a breach in the wall, he tries an assault, but will find himself hurled into the trench in helpless sprawl. He notes that "the author of *The Trial* makes it appear that the existence of persons in the first century professing Christianity, with courage enough to face death in support of their religion, is sufficient to prove the truth of what they believed in." He rejoins by citing the victims of Juggernaut. Behold, says he, the evidence of Hindoo sincerity of conviction; is, therefore, the conviction true?

If the author of *The Trial* had rested the argument on the sincerity alone of the first believers, this answer would have been to the point. But his contention is that the value of the sincerity of their testimony lies in the nature of the particular matter testified to. Their sincerity of conviction, in all the circumstances of the case, is in fact proof of the conviction. This will be apparent on consideration. It was not conviction of the truth of an opinion. A man may have a sincere opinion that may be wrong; but a number of men cannot be mistaken as to the evidence of their senses. It was a question of whether or not the apostles *had seen Christ* after his crucifixion. It was a matter of practical every-day common sense experience. People see people with their eyes, and hear them with their ears every day. If twenty witnesses declared that they saw S. W. in London on a particular day, their evidence would be taken as conclusive if their sincerity could be established, and their sincerity would certainly be taken as established, if they persisted in their statements, in spite of being sent to prison for making them, and some of their number were executed. Sincerity is everything where a number of witnesses are concerned, and where, as in the case of the apostles, they speak to seeing and speaking with a man on a number of separate occasions extending over a period of weeks.

Here S. W. makes a wonderful attempt to reduce the force of this evident conclusion. He introduces a Birmingham woman, "not highly intelligent," who declared to him that Christ on two occasions had come bodily into her dining room; and another woman, who made a statement to the effect that an angel had appeared to her on two separate occasions. He rightly dismisses their assertions, not as falsehoods, but as delusions, due to mental disorder. So, he suggests, it was with the resurrection of Christ! A very plausible suggestion if the evidence rested on the testimony of one witness. If

the evidence of Christ's resurrection rested on Mary's unsupported testimony, it would unquestionably be open to doubt. But what are the facts? We must stick to the evidence. We must not go outside the depositions of the witnesses, as the court would tell any guessing and romancing counsel. The depositions are proved in many ways, for which the reader must be referred to *The Trial*—notably to the speech of Sir Noble Acceptor of Alltruth.

What are the facts deposed to? That Christ appeared alive, first to Mary, then to a group of several women, then to Peter alone (who in his letter says: "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were *eye witnesses*"); then to two in a long country walk in the open air; then to ten of the eleven; then to the whole eleven; then to several of the disciples while fishing; then to an assembly of 500 brethren in Galilee; and finally to the eleven on the summit of the Mount of Olives, from whom he took his departure to heaven. Nay, not finally; last of all he appeared to Saul, of Tarsus, who was changed by the interview from being his most virulent persecutor to his most devoted and faithful apostle for nearly forty years. The testimony by so many witnesses to facts of such a nature, is not in the nature of things open to the suggestion of mental disorder. The interviews were mostly in the open air, and mostly with robust men (fishermen—the least likely of all mankind to be the subject of hallucination). They were repeated in various localities, to the witnesses variously grouped, and during a period of a full month and a half.

The attempt to make such a case parallel with a poor woman's waking dream, is worse than puerile. It is trifling with a solemn subject. For a true parallel there must be, not only two or three, but a great number of witnesses, who speak to not only one but many interviews, scattered in time and place, and lasting over a considerable period of time. If such a case were to arise, there could be but one verdict.

Lord Beaconsfield is dead. Suppose a lady acquaintance of his declares she has seen him alive, and talked with him about the Cyprus Convention. Suppose a group of other lady acquaintances say he has called on them also; suppose they tell Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote, and they make with all haste to High Wycombe church, and find the grave at the end of the church on the hill disturbed and empty, and the Queen's wreath removed. Suppose Lord Beaconsfield appears to them before they leave the grounds; suppose they then go at once to London and convene a select party of his supporters, and declare their experience to them; suppose while they are in conclave, Lord Beaconsfield stands in their midst and tells them with all naturalness and coherency, that though he has been dead, he is now alive, and has a further work to do, and that he proposes they should adopt certain measures with a view to that work; suppose they separate, and that in a few days they have another meeting, at which Lord Beaconsfield again attends. Suppose he eats with them and talks with them freely. Suppose Lord Randolph Churchill hears of it, and says he will believe nothing of it unless he sees Lord Beaconsfield for himself, and identifies certain personal marks that he knows. Suppose at another meeting, again attended by Lord Beaconsfield, Lord

Randolph Churchill is present, sees for himself, inspects the marks of identity and is satisfied. Suppose, a week or two further on, some members of the party go down into the country and Lord Beaconsfield joins them and picnics with them. Suppose, again in a week or two, there is a general meeting of the Conservative party at a chosen spot in the open country, and Lord Beaconsfield appears and harangues the party. Suppose further on, at a last meeting with their chief in London, Lord Beaconsfield takes his departure for an indefinite period, instructing his followers meanwhile to attest the fact of his resuscitation, and to carry out a certain political propaganda in the country against the time of his reappearance.

There would, in these circumstances, be a parallel to what is testified to in the apostolic declarations. What answer to such a case would it be, to suggest that a weak-minded woman once thought she saw a man that had no existence, and that very likely Salisbury and Co. were self-deceived? It would be universally scouted as ridiculous. A weak-minded, hysterical woman might be deceived, but not many strong men. S. W.'s allusions to the alleged modern apparitions of the Virgin Mary are absurd in the circumstances; they have no relevancy whatever. Each appearance rests on the unsupported testimony of one woman. Each time, the testimony has the intrinsic character of fable. It is an insult to reason to make any comparison of them with the apostolic testimony. The resurrection of Christ rests on the evidence of many hale and hearty men, whose testimony bears intrinsic marks of sincerity and truth. All that "S. W." has to say is that the apostles "may have been self-deceived." "May be!" What an extraordinary proposal to give us a "may be" against attested proofs, which pile one on another with irresistible force. Well, if the apostles "may have been" self-deceived, so, of course, may S. W. be in his opposition. We have, therefore, a choice on his own premises: who could hesitate which to make?

CHAPTER XII.

HINDOOISM AND PROFANE HISTORIANS.

We will not follow S. W. in his absurd attempts to find the origin of the apostolic narrative in the puerilities and fables of Hindooism, and the speculative absurdities of Jewish Hellenism. It is wonderful how readily the incoherent trash of all kinds of benighted writers are accepted as worthy of credit by men who reject the apostolic writings, which are authenticated to us in every way in which an ancient document can be authenticated. It is wonderful, and not wonderful. There is such a thing as colour as well as opacity in the intellectual glasses. There is such a thing as intellectual bias, amounting to prejudice of a strength that impels the unhappy victim to shut his eyes in one direction, while opening

all his eyes in the other. In no case is this malady more strikingly illustrated, than in the insulting treatment of the apostolic testimony by men who fall down dumb before Persian oracles, and mention the wisdom of Brahma with bated breath. We can only note the phenomenon as part of the dreadful phantasmagoria of the present evil world, to be endured with resignation in prospect of God's interference at His own appointed time, to change the scene with judgment, and establish new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Neither is there any need to follow S. W.'s re-hash of seeming discrepancies in the New Testament narrative, which have been answered over and over again. We notice but a leading point or two before concluding.

Josephus' silence as to Herod's slaughter of the Bethlehem infants is explicable on two grounds. 1. In the list of Herod's enormities, it was a small incident, not challenging the notice it would have challenged had Herod's reign been an otherwise peaceful reign. 2. Standing related to the affairs of the crucified Galilean, whom it was the right thing to officially ignore, it was not an incident that Josephus could have assigned an easy or natural place in a history dealing only with the political affairs of the nation.

The absence of Christ from the profane histories of the first century is neither wonderful nor difficult to explain. It must be remembered that, with one or two exceptions, we have but fragments of first and second century writers, and these the leading men of their day, writing to please the public, and not likely to notice a tabooed movement. The vast mass of writings produced in that day have perished. Profane historians were courtiers, and attached importance only to events occurring within the circle of political respectability. Christ as a plebian, whom the common people gladly listened to, was below their horizon—a man whom even had they known, it would have been a degradation to their craft to recognise. Though he wrought miracles, his miracles were not of a nature to be seen by "profane historians," who were not present; and these respectable gentlemen, if they heard of them, were not likely to be impressed with them, considering that the rulers of Christ's own nation pronounced them the feats of diabolical art. Palestine, where they were wrought, was a province of the Roman Empire both obscure and infamous in Roman estimation, as Apion's popular diatribes against the Jews conclusively show, and the time during which they were displayed was too short to make any impression beyond the confines of the Holy Land.

It only requires the exercise of a little common sense to see how natural it is that "the profane historians" should be silent on a matter so foreign to both their sight and sympathy, and how little meaning the circumstance of their silence has in the sense insisted upon by the enemies of Christ. How could they write of what they were not likely to know of, or care for, if they heard? The darkening of the land at Christ's crucifixion would pass for a common atmospheric phenomenon, such as we often see any day in Great Britain.

Those who did know, and did care, for the facts concerning Christ have written them : and they are the only men who could really write a reliable account ; namely, the men who were his companions in all his journeyings, and who had "perfect understanding in all things from the beginning:" and whose veracity is attested to all the world by their submission to the terrible personal consequences of their testimony. We do not need any other testimony. The silence of those who knew and cared nothing has no meaning when those who knew all have spoken so loudly that all the world has heard. The historical case for Christ stands upon a base as broad and immovable as the earth itself. The efforts of scepticism against it are but the impatient snappings of scorpion pincers on the rock. They like their work, but they can do nothing. "As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth : But they shall proceed no further ; their folly shall be manifest to all men, as theirs also was" (2nd Tim. iii. 8.)

S. W.'s attempt to answer Paley, we need not trouble ourselves with. He mistakes the points at issue. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny are never brought forward as "witnesses to Christianity," but merely as witnesses to the fact that there were Christians at the end of the first century, merely corroborative witnesses who are by no means essential, though they are a convenient bar to the irrational clamour of those who call for something "outside the gospels." The convulsive efforts to prove even the statements of Tacitus and Co., of doubtful authenticity, where they favour the argument for Christ, would be amusing if it were not the exhibition of a diabolic antagonism that ceases to be respectable when carried to such extremes. The non-mention of the New Testament by the Greek and Roman Pagan writers of the first century is the most natural thing in the world, in view of the proscribed and persecuted position of those to whom the New Testament was more precious than gold. It requires a very small knowledge of human nature, to understand the absence of all allusion to apostolic literature, in the pages of men who wrote to please a licentious public. Modern experience, in relation to the truth, supplies a similar illustration. The men who argue, from the absence of such allusion to the apostolic Scriptures, that the apostolic Scriptures did not exist, evince a shallowness that, on any other subject, would ensure public reprobation.

The authenticity of the four gospels, in spite of the *ipse dixit* of S. W., and the loud-voiced blasphemers with whom he has identified himself, stand the most crucial tests to which documents so ancient can be subjected. But even if it were otherwise, the hope of eternal life would not be lost. We should simply lack interesting information as to the life and sayings of the central figure in the scheme of that hope. There would still remain the unchallengeable writings and speeches of Paul, which bring the guarantee of all the glorious things ensured to us in the authentic accounts of Christ's personal sayings and doings ; and there would still remain the writings of Moses and the prophets, which contain the historic pledge of promised and prophesied goodness to come, with an age when there shall be no more tears, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. Paul and

Moses are pillars—not ornaments—and if Christ, as we see him in the gospels, were by any misfortune to be blotted from our view, the edifice, of which he is the chief corner stone, would still remain. Its outlines would not be so plain to the sight, that would be all. For S. W. to speak of all outside the gospels, being "simply garnish," is simply to parrot the false dogmatism of the learned superficiality he has been swallowing with such gusto. It is not the verdict of knowledge or fact.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUMAN DESTINY AND THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

This is the last matter discussed (in a manner) in S. W.'s pamphlet. It does not come in very natural sequence to the subjects of preceding chapters. Still it is in the order of his discourse, which is somewhat zig-zag both in matter and manner. In this we have been compelled to follow him, though we hope to more purpose. He attempts to criticise New Testament views of human destiny in relation to the character of God. It would have been well if he had been content with his opening admission : "I cannot fathom" it ; it is "too deep." Instead of this, he proceeds to tell us what he is "incapable of bringing his reason to suppose," though he had just said, "It is only the bigot who fancies he can plumb the infinitude." If he cannot plumb it, why does he not let it alone, instead of condemning what the Scriptures reveal ? If it is beyond his power to conceive what the facts of the case ought to be, it may be that what the apostles testify are the facts—namely, that all men are sinners ; that death is the wages of sin ; that there is an appointed way to receive the remission of sin and justification to life eternal—viz., faith in the Christ whom he tries to hide, and obedience to his commandments. If Christ rose, these are undoubtedly the facts ; and if they are the facts, where is the use of fighting against them ? What if it mean the exclusion of many well-meaning sinners, who are not justified ? This is better than excluding all. Surely the apostolic facts are pleasanter facts than the facts that S. W. would have us to accept—viz., that there is no hope for any one, and that the universe is but a machine of death ! S. W. holds his hands aloft in horror at the injustice and narrowness of saving only a few (though that few at last amount to a countless multitude) ; but he sees nothing inconsistent with divine justice and kindness in withholding the hope of salvation altogether ! Whence this inconsistency ? It is not susceptible of an explanation that can be favourable to S. W. He measures divine wisdom by human feeling, while admitting that human feeling cannot supply a standard by which to judge the infinite. He appeals to this feeling in the bosoms of mothers and professing millions. He appeals to "the gods !" (He has quickly donned his pagan robes). If he were pleading for univer-

salism, there might be some sense in his objurgations and his perspiration : but to impeach the apostolic hope of resurrection and coming glory on the ground that it involves the exclusion of such as come not within the scope of the divine operations, while advocating a view that means the blackness and darkness of despair for every living soul upon earth, is a performance we can scarcely credit with a rational sincerity.

It is vain to impeach facts. God is a fact—the first fact—the fact of facts. His existence is evidenced in the construction of the universe, and historically demonstrated in Moses and Christ. His prerogative cannot be questioned by well-balanced reason. The principles on which that prerogative is exercised have been revealed. He is good, but the working out of his goodness among a race of sinners involves pain, and death, and judgment. It is for reason to accept the facts. They are there, like the sky, and the rocks, and the storms, whether we accept them or not. They are facts which, when rightly interpreted and traced to their ultimate issue, give reason cause for rapturous joy. It is hard to kick against the pricks. It is only blindness that apostrophises “evangelical preachers, God-serving congregations, holders of prayer meetings, &c., &c.,” in declamation against the God of wisdom, truth, and mercy. There is nothing but blatant sound and fury in the sentences that denounce the living God of Israel as a monster, and His authenticated covenants of promise as the fictions of human imagination. No greater crime can a man commit than to utter such insulting blasphemies against Him. We can only hope they are due to aberration of reason caused by the shock of a railway collision : and that God in His mercy will therefore forgive the poor man from whose raving lips they issue.